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The FBI's Counterintelligence Division produces the **FBI Monthly Counterintelligence Bulletin** to keep its federal, state, local, and private sector partners informed about counterintelligence threats and issues.

The bulletin's contents are unclassified and available via open sources. Recipients are encouraged to share the bulletin with their partners throughout the U.S. and international law enforcement and intelligence communities, as well as the private sector, as they deem appropriate.

February 2021

West Virginia Woman Sentenced for Willful Retention of Top Secret National Defense Information and International Parental Kidnapping

Elizabeth Jo Shirley was sentenced on January 25 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia to more than eight years in prison for willfully retaining national defense information and international parental kidnapping. Working with the West Virginia State Police, FBI investigators discovered Shirley—who had maintained a security clearance through her employment with the military, cleared defense Se, and U.S. Intelligence Community agencies—traveled to Mexico in July 2019 with classified information and with her daughter, of whom she was the noncustodial parent. In her plea agreement, Shirley admitted she had unlawfully retained classified documents with the intent to contact Russian government representatives and request resettlement in another country. [Read about the sentencing.](#)

Researcher Indicted for Scheme to Defraud National Institutes of Health and University of Florida

A 10-count indictment unsealed on February 3 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida charged former University of Florida (UF) professor Lin Yang with fraudulently obtaining federal research funding by concealing financial support he received from the Chinese government and a company he founded in China. A joint investigation conducted by the FBI and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services revealed Yang—the recipient of a \$1.75 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to develop a bioinformatics tool—allegedly established a business in China to profit from the research and concealed it from both UF and NIH. According to the indictment, Yang also allegedly made false statements and material omissions to UF and NIH to conceal his participation, in connection with China's Northwestern Polytechnic University, in the Thousand Talents Plan, a talent recruitment program used by the Chinese government to acquire foreign research and technology. Yang faces up to 20 years in prison for each of six counts of wire fraud, up to five years in prison for each of four counts of false statements, and potential financial penalties. He remains at large. [Read about the charges.](#)

Chinese National Charged with Criminal Conspiracy to Export Sensitive U.S. Technology to China

A two-count indictment unsealed on January 28 in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia charged Chinese national Cheng Bo for his alleged role in a conspiracy to violate U.S. export controls by shipping power amplifiers, which have potential military applications, to China. Working jointly with the U.S. Department of Commerce and Homeland Security Investigations, FBI investigators discovered Cheng, a sales account manager for Singapore-based electronics distributor Avnet Asia, allegedly submitted to a U.S. manufacturer paperwork that falsely claimed more than \$800,000 worth of export-controlled items, including power amplifiers, would be used in Hong Kong when they were actually destined for mainland China. If apprehended and convicted, Cheng faces up to 20 years in prison and potential financial penalties. As part of a nonprosecution agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice, Avnet Asia agreed to pay more than \$1.5 million to settle criminal liability for the conduct of its employees, including Cheng. [Read about the charges.](#)

Superseding Indictment Expands Charges Against Stanford University Researcher Accused of Visa Fraud

A superseding indictment returned on February 18 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California charged Stanford University researcher Chen Song with visa fraud, obstruction of justice, destruction of documents, and false statements for her alleged role in a scheme to conceal her status as a member of China’s military, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), while in the United States. The FBI’s investigation revealed although Song indicated on her visa application her military work ended in 2011, she was allegedly still working for the PLA when she entered the United States in 2018. According to the superseding indictment, Song allegedly took active steps to conceal her affiliation with the Chinese military, including destroying her PLA credentials, deleting emails and documents related to her military service and employment, and lying to FBI agents during an interview. If convicted, she faces up to 20 years in prison for each count of obstruction and alteration, up to 10 years in prison for visa fraud, up to five years in prison for false statements, and potential financial penalties. [Read about the superseding indictment.](#)

Hospital Researcher Sentenced to Prison for Conspiring to Steal Trade Secrets and Sell Them in China

Li Chen, a former researcher at Nationwide Children’s Hospital, was sentenced on February 1 in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio to two and a half years in prison for conspiring to commit wire fraud and conspiring to steal scientific trade secrets concerning the research, identification, and treatment of various pediatric medical conditions. FBI investigators discovered Chen stole trade secrets from the hospital’s Research Institute, where she had worked for a decade, and established a company in China to sell a product using one of the trade secrets. In her plea agreement, Chen also admitted she received benefits from the Chinese government and applied to multiple Chinese talent recruitment programs. As part of the agreement, she agreed to pay \$2.6 million in restitution and to forfeit approximately \$1.25 million, as well as more than 500,000 shares of common stock. Yu Zhou, Chen’s husband and Nationwide Children’s Hospital colleague, pleaded guilty in December 2020 to his role in the conspiracy. [Read about the sentencing.](#)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

The following information has been prepared by outlets outside the U.S. government and has not been corroborated by the FBI or its partners. It is presented here for your situational awareness.

CNN Details Sweeping New National Security Rules Regulating Hong Kong Schools

A February 5 CNN report highlighted the introduction of comprehensive restrictions on the operation of schools in the semi-autonomous city of Hong Kong, including the potential censure faced by teachers who, according to the new rules, “have committed any act of disrespecting the country.” Issued months after the Chinese government imposed a sweeping new law criminalizing a wide range of broadly defined offenses and allowing authorities to punish what Beijing refers to as political crimes, the rules for Hong Kong schools reportedly mandate instruction on national security issues as early as kindergarten, dictate how educators should handle discipline and dissent, and require compliance by public, private, and international schools. [Read the CNN article.](#)

Guardian Highlights UK Authorities’ Expulsion of Three Chinese Journalists Suspected of Espionage

An article published on February 5 in the *Guardian*, a British media outlet, reported UK authorities’ expulsion of three Chinese individuals suspected of using cover identities as journalists to conceal their alleged work for China’s Ministry of State Security. According to the *Guardian* report, British elected officials plan to introduce new legislation in the spring to modernize the definitions of spying, facilitate prosecutions for activities that include economic espionage, and introduce mandatory disclosure requirements for lobbyists working on behalf of foreign governments. [Read the Guardian article.](#)